

Memo

To: Labor and Public Employees Committee
From: Robert J. Brothers, Jr., Executive Director
Date: March 2, 2010
Re: **HB 5285, AN ACT CONCERNING STATE EMPLOYEES AND VIOLENCE
AND BULLYING IN THE WORKPLACE**

The Commission supports the concept of HB 5285, AN ACT CONCERNING STATE EMPLOYEES AND VIOLENCE AND BULLYING IN THE WORKPLACE but has reservations about the definitions in the bill. There is, we believe, confusion relative to the use of the wording "conduct or a single act." We are ready to work with the Committee and others to clarify these issues if you would like to call on us.

On the merits of the concept HB 5285 requires the establishment of policies and procedures to identify, report, evaluate and investigate complaints of abusive conduct occurring in the workplace between state employees and to educate employees in identifying and preventing bullying and abusive conduct in the workplace.

The CHRO currently receives complaints of harassment in the workplace, some of which starts with bullying behavior and escalates to harassment. Bullying unchecked may lead to violence and physical abuse. Bullying must be stopped before it becomes a more serious problem.

In Fiscal Year 2008-09, the CHRO received 390 complaints alleging "harassment" against employees. The CHRO receives roughly 200 complaints annually against State agencies. Some of these complaints involve harassment. Having an "early intervention" program to raise these issues with employees and managers at the start may help to reduce the number of employees who have to file harassment complaints with CHRO. By the time an employee feels compelled to come to CHRO, the working relationship is severely strained, productivity and morale greatly reduced.

The CHRO applauds this intent behind this bill. It takes an important step forward by recognizing the need for tracking incidents of bullying and providing training. The CHRO notes that the State provides training in the areas of workplace violence and sexual harassment. This training will complement other training currently provided to State employees.